

Board of Supervisors

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October 11, 2011

Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R2-ES-2011- 053
Division of Policy and Directives Management
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042-PDM
Arlington, VA 22203

and

Steve Spangle, Field Supervisor
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Arizona Ecological Services Office
2321 West Royal Palm Rd., Suite 103
Phoenix, AZ 85021

Re: Docket No. FWS-R2-ES-2011-0053; MO92210-0-0009, RIN 1018-AX43 Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Designation of Revised Critical Habitat for Southwestern Willow Flycatcher

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to revise the critical habitat for an endangered migratory bird, the southwestern willow flycatcher. The revision identifies 2,090 stream miles of habitat within the 100-year floodplain of waters located in California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Colorado and New Mexico.

This proposal represents a 183% increase in designated critical habitat as compared to the 2005 critical habitat designation (737 stream miles). Out of the proposed 2,090 stream miles, 24 +/- miles are located within Cochise County as compared to the 14 +/- miles that are currently designated as critical habitat, which represents an increase of 71% in critical habitat designation.

As recommended by the Cochise County Public Lands Advisory Committee, the Cochise County Board of Supervisors submits the following comments to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposal to revise critical habitat for the southwestern willow flycatcher:

It is illogical to increase critical habitat in Cochise County, Arizona, when, as stated in the Federal Register, Page 50573, Column 3, you have already exceed your goals for this area. "The Recovery Plan describes a goal of 150 flycatcher territories in the Middle Gila and San

Pedro Management Unit (Service 2002, p. 85). We identified a large flycatcher nesting population surrounding the Gila and San Pedro River confluence area within Cochise, Pima, Pinal, and Gila Counties, Arizona. Flycatchers were first detected nesting in this Management Unit in 1993, with abundant breeding sites occurring throughout this Management Unit. A high of 195 territories was detected in 2005 (Sogge and Durst 2008).

As further evidenced in Federal Register Page 50572, Column 2, : "The Upper Gila, Middle Gila and San Pedro, and Roosevelt Management Units had, following the 2007 rangewide estimate (Durst *et al.* 2008, p. 12), surpassed numerical recovery goals.

Based on this data as well as our own, we strongly oppose the proposal to revise and expand the critical habitat designation for the southwestern willow flycatcher within Cochise County. Well managed agricultural activities including grazing provide for a healthy riparian habitat that allows the southwestern willow flycatcher to proliferate here and in other areas with similar agricultural irrigation ditches including the U-Bar Ranch in Southwestern New Mexico. Well managed field irrigation and agricultural activities should be incentivized in an effort to increase riparian habitats that ultimately result in an increase in populations of the southwestern willow flycatcher. The proposed critical habitat in Cochise County will do the opposite and the current populations of southwestern willow flycatchers could actually decline.

Additionally, we request formal coordination status on the designation of additional critical habitat for the southwestern willow flycatcher in Cochise County. By coordination status, we refer to what Congress defined as coordination in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act or FLPMA of 1976 and all other subsequent land use statutes.

Cochise County is supportive of recovery policies with the understanding that a full examination of all potential economic and social impacts to Cochise County is made and adequately addressed. Furthermore, we continue to have concerns about U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service policies that potentially result in deleterious and restrictive effects on agricultural activities in Cochise County, including grazing while the agency continues to ignore science that demonstrates clearly that agriculture and grazing are compatible with southwestern willow flycatcher management (see U-Bar Ranch, New Mexico studies and reports previously submitted to your office by biologists).

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposal to revise the critical habitat designation for the southwestern willow flycatcher.

Sincerely,

Patrick G. Call
Chairman, Cochise County Board of Supervisors